

# SPIŠ - VISEGRÁD - DĚBĚČA - ZAGREB - KALOCSA - NAPOLI: CAREER PATHS OF A FAMILY OF THE LOWER HUNGARIAN NOBILITY IN THE THIRTEENTH TO FIFTEENTH CENTURIES\*

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When John of Spiš, the Archbishop of Naples, was deposed in 1411 it was not just the end of an interesting career of a medieval Hungarian cleric. It also brought an end to the century-and-a-half-long story of a Hungarian middle class noble family. The family's status had not been based on extensive property ownership: instead it relied on holding various ranks and posts across the entire medieval Hungarian kingdom. This article looks at the way in which these posts had been obtained and ponders the level of nepotism in this process.

At first, the term nepotism, often used in this article, should be explained. *Sensu stricto*, nepotism has been defined as a favouritism based on kinship. We can conceive this definition from two points of view. This word is often used to describe a situation in which the benefit or the promotion stems directly from a relative (uncle, father, etc.).<sup>1</sup> However, there is also a second meaning of the word nepotism. In a broader meaning of this term, it is used as a synonym for favouritism. It could be described as a situation in which a high-ranking person (e. g. pope, king or bishop), as a source of benefits, promotes a person as a result of the influence and merits of the recipient's relatives. This type of situation (in Hungarian kingdom more common) can also be called indirect nepotism.

While reconstructing the complete genealogy of the noblemen of \*Štefkovce,<sup>2</sup> 26 members (half men and half women) in four different generations

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<sup>1</sup> The international term nepotism (Fr. *népotisme*, Germ. *r Nepotismus*, It. *nepotismo*) reflect usual relation between donor and recipient of benefits (uncle – nephew).

<sup>2</sup> Today an extinct residence in northern Slovakia in the former Spiš County, near Spiš castle, within the Nemešany municipality, Levoča County. The residence (under an incorrect name) had been researched by Bello Polla, *Stredoveká zaniknutá osada na Spiši (Zalužany)* [The Medieval Extinct Village in Spiš (Zalužany)] (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1962). Names of the village used in sources: 1295 *villa Stephani* (MNL OL DL 63621); 1319 *Stepkfálua* (*RDSI II*, 205, no. 434); 1343 *villa Stephek* (MNL OL DL 83237). On the localisation of the village, see the discussion in Miroslav Števík, "Stredoveká zaniknutá osada na Spiši (Zalužany)?" [The Medieval Extinct Village in Spiš (Zalužany)?], in *K dejinám Podolínce a novovekého Spiša Spiša* [To the history of Podolín and the new Spiš], ed. Miroslav Števík (Stará Ľubovňa: Ľubovnianske múzeum, 2006), 103–108; Michal Slivka, "Historiografia spišskej historickej antropológie stredoveku" [Historiography of Historical Anthropology of Medieval Spiš], *Kultúrne dejiny I*, no. 1 (2010): 51–52, footnote no. 32; Miroslav Števík, "Krátke poznámky k dejinám Spišskej kapituly a osady Štefkovce na základe

between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries were successfully identified.<sup>3</sup> This family forms a model which can be used to demonstrate the so-called family career. This *terminus technicus* can be defined as the ability of a clan to hold various offices and ranks through its members over several generations, and the main subject of this study is the role of the previous generation in securing the success of the following one. The choice of a clan of the middle class Hungarian nobility is not accidental. Their small (indeed, from the point of view of the whole of Hungary, almost insignificant) property tenure was not the determining factor of the clan's status nor of the careers of its members. Therefore, in comparison with the magnate clans they had had to rely much more heavily on their own capabilities.

*Jacob I – Prologue*

The oldest members of the clan appear in written sources in the second half of the thirteenth century. In 1278, brothers Jacob, John and Stanislaus bought the Ordzovany property and thus extended their property tenure in Spiš.<sup>4</sup> This transaction was shortly after confirmed by the king as a result of the family's help with suppressing the Roland's revolt against his rule in Spiš in 1277.<sup>5</sup> Jacob (probably the oldest of the brothers) was then captured by Count Roland (the

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rozboru metácie z roku 1274" [Short Notes on History of the Spiš Chapter and village Štefkovce on the Base of Analysis of the Measuring from Year 1274], in *Spiš v 12. a 13. storočí* [Spiš in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Centuries], ed. Miroslav Števík (Stará Ľubovňa: Ľubovnianske múzeum, 2011), 99-101; Peter Labanc, *Spišskí prepošti do roku 1405* [Provosts of Spiš till 1405] (Trnava: Filozofická fakulta Trnavskej univerzity; Kraków: Towarzystwo Słowaków w Polsce, 2011), 178-179; Peter Labanc, *Vývoj šľachty na Spiši do začiatku 14. storočia* [Development of the Nobility in Spiš till the Beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century] (Trnava: Filozofická fakulta Trnavskej univerzity; Kraków: Towarzystwo Słowaków w Polsce, 2011), 84-85. All of these reconsiderations bring revision and emendation of the localisation published by Antal Fekete-Nagy, *A Szepesség területi és társadalmi kialakulása* [The Territorial and Social Formation of Spiš] (Budapest: A Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1934), 157-158. The symbol \* used before toponyms marks reconstructed names of extinct settlements.

<sup>3</sup> This number includes all the male members born in the male lineage and their daughters. Their husbands and offspring are not included in this number as they are members of different clans. Peter Labanc, "Die Ahnen und Verwandten des Zagreber Bischofs Johannes von der Zips (1394-1397)," in *Slovakia and Croatia: Historical Parallels and Connections (until 1780)*, eds. Martin Homza and Neven Budak (Bratislava: Department of Slovak History at the Faculty of Philosophy of Comenius University Bratislava and PostScriptum 2013), 255. This paper brings some emendations of the genealogical tables from Pál Engel, *Középkori magyar genealógia* [Genealogy of the Medieval Hungarian Kingdom] (Budapest: Arcanum, 2001), CD-ROM, Szepesi (Stefkfalvi).

<sup>4</sup> *Regesta regum stirpis Arpadianae critico-diplomatica vol. II/2-3*, eds. Iván Borsa and Emericus Szentpétery (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1961), 218, no. 2897.

<sup>5</sup> For more about the revolt see Gyula Pauler, *A magyar nemzet története az Árpád házi királyok alatt I-II* [History of Magyars under Arpadian Dynasty] (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1899), vol. II, 335, endnotes 553-554; Peter Labanc, "Spoločenská situácia na Spiši za vlády posledných Árpádovcov" [Social Situation in Spiš during the Reign of the Last Three Arpadians Kings], in *Spiš v 12. a 13. storočí* [Spiš in 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Century], ed. Miroslav Števík (Stará Ľubovňa: Ľubovnianske múzeum, 2011), 163-167.

leader of the revolt) and was released only after paying a ransom.<sup>6</sup> A few years later (1283), King Ladislaus IV rewarded his supporters for their faithful service and confirmed the three brothers' entitlement to Hungarian aristocratic privileges.<sup>7</sup>

At the end of the thirteenth century, the abovementioned Jacob was the key member of the family. At that time, he was not only a priest in Spišské Vlachy, but also the chancellor of the Chapter of Spiš.

Particularly, the latter rank was an important one within the chapter, as it involved administration of the place of authentication (*locus credibilis*) and the canonry school.<sup>8</sup> Demonstrably, Jacob held this rank between 1275 and 1284 and subsequently he was elected provost of Spiš.<sup>9</sup> It was one of the most important benefices of the Esztergom archdiocese, as confirmed by the fact that in the fourteenth century we know of several provosts for whom Spiš had been just a stop along on the way from less important benefices (for example in Kalocsa, Vác, Esztergom) to the bishop's mitre (Veszprém, Cenad).

Jacob most probably belonged to a category of strong, capable and important persons. We can claim this based on several events from the period of his tenure as the provost of Spiš. In the first years of his tenure he became embroiled in conflict with his own chapter and the dispute was solved in the presence of Esztergom's archbishop Lodomerius.<sup>10</sup> Thanks to the same archbishop, Jacob became bishop *ad personam* in 1293<sup>11</sup> and later Lodomerius

<sup>6</sup> *Codex diplomaticus Arpadianus continuatus vol. IX*, ed. Gusztáv Wenzel (Pest: Eggenberger Ferdinánd Akadémiai könyvtárusmál, 1871), 377–378, no. 269: *...inhumaniter captus extiterit et miserabiliter cruciatus...*

<sup>7</sup> MNL OL DL 83140; *Codex diplomaticus patrius V*, eds. Arnoldus Ipolyi et al. (Jaurini: Typis Victoris Sauervein, 1878), 66–68, no. 54.

<sup>8</sup> Elemér Mályusz, *Egyházi társadalom a középkori Magyarországon* [Church Society in Medieval Kingdom of Hungary] (Budapest: Műszaki Kiadó, 2007), 60; Miroslav Glejtek, "Príspevok k výskumu organizačnej štruktúry Spišskej kapituly" [Contribution to Research of the Organizational Structure of the Spiš Chapter], *Konštantínove listy* 5 (2012): 43–44; Ante Gulin, *Hrvatski srednjovjekovni kaptoli: loca credibilia sjeverne i središnje Hrvatske* [Croatian Medieval Chapters: Loca Credibilia in Northern and Central Croatia] (Zagreb: Golden marketing, 2001), 156; Zsolt Hunyadi, "Administering the Law: Hungary's *Loca Credibilia*," in *Custom and Law in Central Europe*, ed. Martin Rady (Cambridge: Faculty of Law, University of Cambridge, 2003), 33; Miriam Hlavačková, *Kapitula pri Dóme sv. Martina: Intelektuálne centrum Bratislavy v 15. storočí* [Chapter of St. Martin: Intellectual Centre of Bratislava in the 15th Century] (Bratislava: Slovenská akadémia vied, Historický ústav, 2008), 28.

<sup>9</sup> Labanc, *Spišské prepošti*, 85ff.

<sup>10</sup> MNL OL DF 264579; Josephus Hradsky, *Initia progressus ac praesens status Capituli ad sanctum Martinum E. C. de Monte Scepusio* (Szepesváralja: Typis Dionysii Buzás, 1901), 310–318; *MES II*, 208–213, no. 188.

<sup>11</sup> Vladimír Rábik, "Spišský župan Bald(uin) (1290–1301) a spoločenské pomery na Spiši za vlády posledného Arpádovca" [Bald(uin), Count of Spiš (1290–1301), and Social Situation in Spiš during the Reign of the Last Arpadian King], *Studia Archeologica Slovaca Mediaevalia V* (2006): 30–31.

named him his own vicar.<sup>12</sup> Finally, Jacob participated in the procession of dignitaries who, in the summer of 1301, went to greet the Czech Prince Wenceslas, rival of Charles Robert for the Hungarian throne. However, this happened at the end of Jacob's life; shortly after that he died in Buda.<sup>13</sup>

*Jacob II – the story continues*

Despite the fact that out of the three brothers only John had male heirs to carry on the family name, the family career continued.<sup>14</sup> This was made possible by John's five sons. The first one can be traced all the way back to 1285, to the conflict between provost Jacob and the canons of the Chapter of Spiš. Among other things, the canons opposed the fact that Jacob granted the benefice of the chapter to his nephew of the same name.<sup>15</sup> One of the main problems (besides apparent nepotism) was his young age. We can ascertain this not only by the length of his tenure in the Chapter of Spiš (1285-1345),<sup>16</sup> but also by the fact that his other four brothers appear in sources approximately 15 years after him, although they died at about the same time.<sup>17</sup>

Approximately three decades after being named canon, Jacob became a priest in Košice (he held this post at least until 1318).<sup>18</sup> It was an important rectory with adequate income.

Although the citizens of Košice obtained a written right to the free choice of a priest after Jacob's death,<sup>19</sup> it is possible that they had performed this choice before, even without the written privilege. In any case, holding the post of priest in Košice (until ca. 1318) suggests that Jacob's career had not been dependent only on the status of his uncle Jacob (d. 1301), but that he was in fact able to develop it without family help. Around the time the Spiš canon and the priest of Košice died, the name of another follower of the family career starts to appear in

<sup>12</sup> MNL OL DF250301; *MES II*, 400, no. 407; *CDH VI/2*, 85-87.

<sup>13</sup> *Chronici hungarici compositio saeculi XIV*, ed. Alexander Domanovszky, in *Scriptores rerum hungaricarum tempore ducum regumque stirpis Arpadianae vol. I*, ed. Emericus Szentpétery (Budapestini: Academia Litterarum Hungarica atque Societate Historica Hungarica, 1937), 478-480.

<sup>14</sup> As a result of his celibacy Jacob did not have a male successor. Stanislaus' only successor was his daughter Margaret (MNL OL DL 83623).

<sup>15</sup> *MES II*, 208-213, no. 188; Hradszky, *Initia*, 310-318.

<sup>16</sup> In the following study – Peter Labanc, "Organizačná štruktúra Spišskej kapituly a jej členovia do konca 13. storočia" [Organisational Structure of the Spiš Chapter and its Members up to the End of the 13<sup>th</sup> Century], in *Litteris ac moribus imbutus: Studia historica Tyrnaviensia XVI*, ed. Vladimír Rábik (Trnava: Filozofická fakulta Trnavskej univerzity; Kraków: Towarzystwo Słowaków w Polsce, 2014), 116 – I mention the last reference to Jacob from 1339. During a further study, I was able to find another reference dating back to 1345 (MNL OL DL 85265).

<sup>17</sup> For a graphic representation of the period of individual family members' lives, see Labanc, "Die Ahnen und Verwandten," 257-258.

<sup>18</sup> *RDSI II*, 193-194, no. 404.

<sup>19</sup> Miroslava Slezáková and Katarína Nádaská, "Košice," in Martin Štefánik et al., *Lexikon stredovekých miest na Slovensku* [Lexicon of Medieval Towns in Slovakia] (Bratislava: Historický ústav SAV, 2010), 206.

written sources.

*Jacob III – the climax*

Jacob (the nephew of the priest of Košice and the grand-nephew of the Spiš provost) often appears in written sources (dated from 1349 to 1353), referred to as the *litteratus*.<sup>20</sup> This was an indication of an educated person, but the particular characteristic and the level of his education is only hypothetical,<sup>21</sup> especially if we place it into the spotlight of the medieval expression *omnes litteratus est clericus*.<sup>22</sup> By and large, we may say that it was a rare indication, and we know of only a few persons from the mid-fourteenth century living in the same geographical area who were referred to in this way. These were not only secular people,<sup>23</sup> but clerics as well.<sup>24</sup> The latter group was more numerous, but they did not use the indication *litteratus* throughout their entire career. After achieving higher ranks and offices, it ceased to be used in written sources. The indication was not used thoroughly by secular people either, but in secular cases the time interval of its use was longer. Based on these findings, we can assume that Jacob the litterateur had finished his institutional education in a chapter school (probably in Spiš where his uncle had been canon) and at some point he might have been facing a decision to continue in an ecclesiastic career or in the secular sphere.<sup>25</sup>

The sources from following periods prove that he chose the secular road. Jacob was mentioned for the first time in 1348 still alongside his father, Detricus.<sup>26</sup> Three years later (1351), he already worked as a notary in the office of a judge royal (*iudex curiae*) named Thomas.<sup>27</sup> Shortly after that (1353-1354), he was probably the notary of king's court, and in the years 1356-1358 he returned as the protonotary to the judge royal (Nicholas from Szécsény).<sup>28</sup> Then, from 1360 to 1372, he worked continuously as a protonotary for two other

<sup>20</sup> MNL OL DL 83256; MNL OL DL 83257; MNL OL DL 60257; MNL OL DL 74815; MNL OL DL 60262; MNL OL DL 60272.

<sup>21</sup> Probably, he never studied at university. Iván Bertényi, *Az országbírói intézmény története a XIV. században* [History of the Royal Judge Office in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1976), 139.

<sup>22</sup> Edward Potkowski, "Clerici uxorati – mała wspólnota kościelna czy grupa zawodowa" [Clerici Uxorati – Small Church Society or Professional Group], in *Wspólnoty małe i duże w społeczeństwach Czech i Polski w średniowieczu i w czasach wczesnonowożytnych* [Small and Large Groups in the Bohemian and Polish Societies in the Medieval and Early Modern Period], eds. Wojciech Iwańczak and Janusz Smolucha (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2010), 196.

<sup>23</sup> E.g. David 1374 – 1390 (MNL OL DL 107356; MNL OL DL 60459) or Jacob 1341 – 1344 (MNL OL DL 39654; MNL OL DL 63674).

<sup>24</sup> E.g. John from Šarišské Sokolovce 1349 (MNL OL DL 262706) or Stephen 1369 (MNL OL DL 37268).

<sup>25</sup> An interesting work on this subject was written by Potkowski, "Clerici uxorati," 193-208.

<sup>26</sup> MNL OL DL 83255.

<sup>27</sup> MNL OL DL 83262.

<sup>28</sup> Bertényi, *Az országbírói intézmény*, 139.

Hungarian palatines.<sup>29</sup> From all of these posts, we can solidly ascertain that his successful career had not resulted from a family or other affinity to certain persons, but that the reasons can be found in his own strength, skills and knowledge, gained throughout his long practice.<sup>30</sup> His lengthy career culminated in the post of judge royal, which he held twice, first in 1372 and then from 1373 until his death in 1380.<sup>31</sup>

### *John – Epilogue*

At the time of Judge Royal Jacob's death, only two male descendants of the clan were alive: his cousin Jordan (who died after 1401 without children)<sup>32</sup> and Jacob's son, John. According to the first reference, from spring 1378, he was canon of Esztergom's chapter, and the Hungarian King, Louis I, had reserved for him the post of archdeacon in Dăbâca, in the diocese of Transylvania.<sup>33</sup> At the end of that year, the former Dăbâca archdeacon, Thomas, was named bishop of Cenad, and thus John was able to take advantage of the king's reservation. The king appointed him by issuing a charter on 6 December 1378,<sup>34</sup> and according to the king's own words he did so to reciprocate the faithful service of Judge Royal Jacob.<sup>35</sup> After appointing Jacob canon in 1285, this is the second explicit example of nepotism in the family's history. The subsequent development of John's career, however, demonstrates that this moment was really just a stepping stone in his progress, rather than an example of simple nepotism. A tangible proof of John's education and his future potential is the fact that the revenues from Dăbâca archdeaconry and the benefice in Alba Iulia chapter served from the beginning to secure the university students' livelihood. A few weeks after acquiring the benefice, John was already in Padua and in the same year (1379), he signed up to study law.<sup>36</sup> Three years later, he bore the title Doctor of Decrees,<sup>37</sup> and in 1385 he was taking his final doctoral exams in Bologna, where he also was elected as

<sup>29</sup> Nicholas Kont (MNL OL DL 83279; MNL OL DL 60314) and Vladislaus of Opole (MNL OL DL 83308; MNL OL DL 83334).

<sup>30</sup> Bertényi, *Az országbírói intézmény*, 138-139; Iván Bertényi, "Krajinský sudca Jakub zo Spiša" [Jacob from Spiš, Judge of the Royal Court], *Slovenská archivistika* V, no. 2 (1970): 262-263.

<sup>31</sup> Bertényi, *Az országbírói intézmény*, 146-174; Bertényi, "Krajinský sudca," 264-272.

<sup>32</sup> The last direct reference MNL OL DF 274655.

<sup>33</sup> MNL OL DL 83357; *DRH C XV*, 395-396, no. 245 (*in extenso* edition with translation to Romanian).

<sup>34</sup> MNL OL DL 83360; *DRH C XV*, 515-516, no. 318 (*in extenso* edition with translation to Romanian).

<sup>35</sup> MNL OL DL 83357; *DRH C XV*, 395-396, no. 245: "...nos[i. e. Lodouicus, Dei gracia, rex Vngarie etc.] consideratis fidelitatibus et laudabilium serviciorum meritis fidelis nostri dilecti magnifici viri Iacobi de Scepus comitis curie nostre..."

<sup>36</sup> Antal Pór, "Adatok a bolognai és padovai jogegyetemen a XIV. században tanult magyarokról" [Informations on Hungarian students of Law in Universities of Bologna and Padova in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century], *Századok* XXXI (1897): 786-787.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 789.

the rector of transalpine students (*rector dominorum ultramontanorum*).<sup>38</sup> In this part of John's life, we can no longer assume the influence of his father, Jacob; not only had John studied outside of Hungary, but Jacob himself died in the summer of 1380.<sup>39</sup>

After finishing his university studies, the talented student returned to Hungary, where a change of dynasties was taking place. The Anjous were being replaced by Sigismund of Luxemburg, who assumed power in 1387. The new king named John the superior of his chapel (*magister/comes capelle regie maiestatis*, documented 1388-1393)<sup>40</sup> and, subsequently, also his secret chancellor (*secretarius cancellarius*, 1392-1396).<sup>41</sup> In addition to the posts connected to the royal court, John was also rising in the Church hierarchy. In 1390, Pope Boniface IX reserved for him one of the three priories: Spiš, Székesfehérvár or Titel (Тител, Serbia).<sup>42</sup> He assumed none of them as Nicholas, then Provost of Spiš, died in 1392 and George of Csorna, a relative of archbishop John of Nagykanizsa, became his immediate successor.<sup>43</sup> Changes in provost posts in Székesfehérvár and in Titel did not occur until the beginning of the fifteenth century.<sup>44</sup> The offices John had been offered were, however, only a sign of things to come. At the beginning of 1395, he became bishop of Zagreb<sup>45</sup> and there is a reference to him holding this office even on 20 August 1397,<sup>46</sup> although on 16 July of the same year Eberhard was named the new bishop by Pope Boniface IX.<sup>47</sup> What were the reasons for John's removal from the office of Bishop of Zagreb, if in 1396 Sigismund of Luxemburg had entrusted him with leading the Assembly of Croatian Nobility in

<sup>38</sup> Andreas Veress, *Matricula et acta Hungarorum in universitatibus Italiae studentium* (Budapest: Academia Scientiarum Hungarica, 1941), 31. Details on this title see James A. Brundage, *The Medieval Origins of the Legal Profession. Canonists, Civilians, and Courts* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press), 224.

<sup>39</sup> Bertényi, "Krajinský sudca," 272.

<sup>40</sup> 1388: *CDH X/1*, 750-756, no. IX; 1393: MNL OL DF 258916.

<sup>41</sup> Pál Engel, *Magyarország világi archontológiája 1301-1457* [Secular Archontology of the Kingdom of Hungary 1301-1457] (Budapest: Arcanum, 2001), CD-ROM, Titkos kancellár (*secretarius cancellarius*).

<sup>42</sup> *Bullae Bonifacii IX. P. M. 1389 - 1396*, ed. Guilielmus Fraknoi, *Monumenta Vaticana historiam regni Hungariae illustrantia*, Series I, Tomus III (Budapestini: Franklin-Társulat nyomdája, 1888), 65-66, no. LXXVIII.

<sup>43</sup> Labanc, *Spišski prepošti*, 152.

<sup>44</sup> Norbert C. Tóth, *A székes- és társaskáptalanok prépostjainak archontológiája 1387-1437* [Archontology of Provosts in Cathedral and Collegiate Chapters 1387-1437] (Budapest: MTA Támogatott Kutatócsoportok Irodája, 2013), 42 (Székesfehérvár) a 64 (Titel).

<sup>45</sup> Andrija Lukinović, "Ivan Šipuški" [John from Spiš], in Batelja Juraj et al., *Zagrebački biskupi i nadbiskupi* [Bishops and Archbishops of Zagreb] (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1995), 156.

<sup>46</sup> MNL OL DL 74848.

<sup>47</sup> *Bullae Bonifacii IX. P. M. 1396 - 1404*, ed. Guilielmus Fraknoi, *Monumenta Vaticana historiam regni Hungariae illustrantia*, Series I, Tomus IV (Budapestini: Franklin-Társulat nyomdája, 1889), 26-27, no. XL.

Nin,<sup>48</sup> and shortly before had relied on him to organize military expeditions against the Ottoman Turks?<sup>49</sup> We don't have any direct evidence to answer this question. We can only say that the reasons for John's deposition originated from the complicated political situation in Hungary following the death of Queen Mary, daughter of Louis I the Great. As a result of marrying her, Sigismund of Luxemburg became king, but after Mary's death his legitimacy was challenged. After losing the battle near Nikopol (Никопол, Bulgaria) and during his longer absence, there had been an attempt to offer the throne to the Anjous of Naples. At the end of 1396, however, Sigismund landed in Dalmatia and the revolt's leaders (the Lackfis) paid for their betrayal with their own lives.<sup>50</sup> A few months later, John was replaced as Bishop of Zagreb by Eberhard, a person close to Sigismund.<sup>51</sup> This measure is clearly related to Sigismund's dealings with the supporters of the Anjous' claim to the Hungarian throne.

The affinity of the Anjous and the nobles of \*Štefkovce can also be corroborated by the inventory of Zagreb Cathedral's treasure, which contained a chasuble<sup>52</sup> decorated with King's Louis I's coat of arms, which was donated to the cathedral by John when he was Bishop of Zagreb in order to redeem Queen Mary's soul.<sup>53</sup>

From 1397 to 1401, John withdrew from public life, and a rare reference from 1399 suggests that he retreated to his family estate in Spiš. During this period, however, he continued to use the title Bishop of Zagreb.<sup>54</sup>

In 1401, Pope Boniface IX (a supporter of the Anjous' claims in Hungary), appointed John Archbishop of Kalocsa.<sup>55</sup> The *Bulla* (appointment letter) is dated March 1401, but John had been titled *electus Colociensis* as early as the beginning of January 1401.<sup>56</sup> More than two years later, the same pope transferred John back

<sup>48</sup> Andrija Lukinović, "Zagrebački biskupi Ivan Smilo i Ivan Šipuški 1388-1397" [John Smil and John from Spiš, bishops of Zagreb 1388 – 1397], *Croatia Christiana Periodica* 14, no. 25 (1990): 195.

<sup>49</sup> Daniela Dvořáková, *Rytier a jeho král. Stibor zo Stiboríc a Žigmund Luxemburský* [The Knight and his King. Stiborius of Šciborzyce and Sigismund of Luxemburg] (Budmerice: Vydavateľstvo Rak, 2003), 60.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>51</sup> In a decree from 1397 Sigismund pledged not to grant Hungarian offices to foreigners. He reserved only three exceptions, one of them concerning the aforementioned Eberhard. *The Laws of the Medieval Kingdom of Hungary II (1301-1457)*, eds. et trans. János M. Bak et al. (Salt Lake City: Charles Schlacks, Jr., Publisher, 1992), 24.

<sup>52</sup> Top liturgical vestment of a Roman Catholic priest or a bishop. Joseph Braun, *Liturgisches Handlexikon* (München: Mäander Verlag 1993), 156.

<sup>53</sup> *Monumenta historica liberae regiae civitatis Zagrabiae metropolis regni Dalmatiae, Croatiae et Slavoniae XI*, ed. Joannes Bapt. Tkalčić (Zagrabiae: Typis C. Albrecht, 1905), 149-150.

<sup>54</sup> MNL OL DL 63709.

<sup>55</sup> Ferdo Šišić, "Nekolika isprava iz početka XV st." [Some Documents from the Beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century], *Starine XXXIX* (1938), 154-155, no. 9.

<sup>56</sup> MNL OL DL 83467.



to Zagreb where he resumed the bishop's post.<sup>57</sup> By that time, John had become a trusted part of the entourage of Ladislaus of Naples, who at that time resided in Zadar.<sup>58</sup> King Ladislaus himself called John his advisor<sup>59</sup> and later helped him to become Archbishop of Naples.<sup>60</sup> When John died in exile, he was the last male member of the nobility of \*Štefkovce<sup>61</sup> – the residence that retired from history shortly after the clan had died out without male heirs.<sup>62</sup>

At the beginning, John's life did not resemble the last chapter of the clan's history, although the number of his male relatives could have suggested some trouble. Based on his career we can safely call him a member of the educated and powerful elite of the Hungarian kingdom. His promising career, however, was affected by turbulences connected to changes in the Hungarian dynasty, as he supported the unsuccessful candidate.

### *Distant relatives*

While analysing the genealogy of Bishop John of Zagreb's ancestors and relatives, in addition to his close relatives, we were able to reconstruct the wider family relations as well – not just in the direct male lineage, but also in families connected to him through marriage. One of them is the clan of Vlková lords – successors of Jacob and of a sister of Jacob Provost of Spiš (1284-1301) whose name is not known.<sup>63</sup> In the fourth generation of the family, we succeeded in identifying a few persons holding several important posts in the kingdom's church hierarchy: Stephen was chancellor of Esztergom Cathedral Chapter between 1382 and 1417;<sup>64</sup> and Ladislaus of Vlková was simultaneously governor of the Cistercian abbey in Spišský Štiavnik and titular Bishop of Vrana (1396), and from 1397 titular Bishop of Knin.<sup>65</sup> Their other brother, Paul, was, for a short time between the years 1396 and 1397, Bishop of Oradea.<sup>66</sup>

The relationship of these brothers to the lords of \*Štefkovce cannot be always reconstructed using direct evidence. Judge Royal Jacob and his son, John,

<sup>57</sup> Šišić, "Nekolika isprava," 206-207, no. 51.

<sup>58</sup> Lukinović, "Zagrebački biskupi," 199.

<sup>59</sup> Šišić, "Nekolika isprava," 215-216, no. 60. The Charter was published about a month after king Ladislaus' coronation in Zadar. Alessandro Cutolo, *Re Ladislao D'Angiò Durazzo* (Napoli: Arturo Berisio editore, 1969), 268.

<sup>60</sup> Lukinović, "Zagrebački biskupi," 199.

<sup>61</sup> Jordan, the cousin of John's father Jacob, died at the beginning of the fifteenth century. The last direct reference to him comes from 1401 (MNL OL DF 274655).

<sup>62</sup> Polla, *Stredoveká*, 157.

<sup>63</sup> On the identification of Jacob and genealogy of his family see Labanc, "Die Ahnen und Verwandten," 251-253 and 256.

<sup>64</sup> Ferencz Kollányi, *Esztergomi kanonokok 1100-1900* [Canons of Esztergom Chapter 1100-1900] (Esztergom: Buzárovits Gusztáv könyvnyomdája, 1900), 69, mentions the years 1383-1417. Record for the year 1382 (MNL OL DF 244108).

<sup>65</sup> Lukinović, "Zagrebački biskupi," 190; Engel, *Magyarország világi archontológiája*, Knini püspök (episcopus Tinniniensis).

<sup>66</sup> Engel, *Magyarország világi archontológiája*, Váradi püspök (episcopus Varadiensis).

had seemingly no influence over Stephen's career. He was named chancellor shortly before the year 1382, probably after the Judge Royal's death. It was at a time when the future Bishop of Zagreb, John, was still studying in Italy. On the other hand, Ladislaus' career is connected to John's more obviously. John appointed Ladislaus of Vlková, his relative, Deputy Bishop (*locumtenens*) of Zagreb diocese.<sup>67</sup> The reason for this was that John had not been spending much time in Zagreb, as he had either been travelling abroad on diplomatic missions or spending time in Buda.<sup>68</sup> Later, after John's deposition, they both (John and Ladislaus) retreated to Spiš.<sup>69</sup> The third of the brothers, Paul, was elected Bishop of Oradea at the peak of John's career, and thus there is reason to speculate about their mutual connection.

When researching the wider family of the \*Štefkovce nobility we found another interesting person. A trial on the filial quarter in 1347-1348 from John (the grandfather of the Jacob who became Judge Royal) reveals his bonds with the Apród family from Šarišské Sokolovce.<sup>70</sup> One of them, Nicholas Apród, had had a son named John from his marriage with Scholastica, daughter of Pancratius, (probably) from a marriage with one of John's daughters from \*Štefkovce.<sup>71</sup> The son of Nicholas and Scholastica became a noted Hungarian chronicler. Any influence of this important Hungarian scholar on the family career of the \*Štefkovce nobility is only speculative without any specific evidence. However, the fact is that he operated in the environment of the royal court and in the centre of the Esztergom archdiocese around the same time as the judge royal Jacob, as well as his son John, at least partially.<sup>72</sup>

#### *Nepotism versus skills?*

In each of the four identified generations of family in question, there was at least one distinct member who held several important offices or ranks during his life. In this context, we may ask ourselves a few questions. The most basic one tries to uncover the role of nepotism in the careers of family members, or at least to determine its level of influence on the family's success. In other words, by reconstructing the prosopography of political and scholarly elites in the medieval Hungarian Kingdom, we are able to partially grasp manifestations of basic nepotism and to identify situations in which it used to occur.

<sup>67</sup> Lukinović, "Zagrebački biskupi," 190.

<sup>68</sup> Lajos Thallóczy, *Mantovai követjárás Budán 1395* [Emissary of Mantova Journey to Buda in 1395] (Budapest: A Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1905), 105-106, no. VI.

<sup>69</sup> MNL OL DL 63709.

<sup>70</sup> MNL OL DL 83247; MNL OL DL 60255.

<sup>71</sup> There is lack of space for the reconsiderations of my older conclusions on the relations between this families. Anyway, it would be topic for the next research. On incorrect interpretations, see Labanc, "Die Ahnen und Verwandten," 254.

<sup>72</sup> József Köblös, "Küküllei János," in *Korai magyar történeti lexikon (9-14. század)*, ed. Gyula Kristó (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó 1994), 387.

In this family's history, we were able to identify three situations in which nepotism, in the true sense of the word, occurred. First, the provost Jacob named his nephew, Jacob, Canon of the Spiš Chapter in 1285, doing so against the chapter's will. Then, in 1378, King Louis I granted the position of Archdeacon of Dăbâca to Judge Royal Jacob's son, John, for his service to the king. Finally, almost 20 years later, John named his relative Ladislaus of Vlková his Deputy in Zagreb. Other career advances of the mentioned protégés, nevertheless, suggest that these direct manifestations of nepotism occurred only at the beginning of their careers. Later, they relied on their own skills, and if they had not been skilled enough, their careers would have clearly regressed at some point.

This statement, however, applies principally to the middle nobility that could not base its influence on vast property holdings. Magnate clans, on the other hand (if using contemporary political-economic jargon), were too big to fail: not in a commercial sense, but rather the political stability of the kingdom could have been disrupted, which would have eventually worked against the ruler. The king was able to go against the magnates only on rare occasions; however, the king's opponents from the lower classes of nobles were typically more vulnerable. We can think in similar terms about the forms and the scope of nepotism. While in the case of middle class nobility, the signs of nepotism occur at the start of individual members' careers, in the upper nobility context, this phenomenon is more frequent; moreover, it is accompanied by more negative effects. George, Provost of Spiš, may serve as a good example. He became provost thanks to his relative, John of Nagykanisza, Archbishop of Esztergom. In 1394, the pope confirmed his appointment, but there was a condition: he needed to be able to read, write, sing and speak Latin sufficiently. If he was unable to sing and perform the oaths, he needed to learn to do so within a year.<sup>73</sup> A canonical visitation of the Esztergom Chapter of 1397 revealed that George had not prayed the breviary.<sup>74</sup> Despite these obvious faults, George remained provost a few more years, most likely due to his connection to the Nagykanisza family, one of the most important clans of the Hungarian kingdom at that time.

It seems that nepotism has been an integral part of each society and varies only by the scope of its distribution. These phenomena, however, should not be considered a priori negative. It becomes negative only if the person in question possesses insufficient skills to hold and perform the acquired office or function. In other cases, we may talk about neutral or even positive effects, if, as a result of nepotism, a skilled individual like, for instance, John of Spiš, is able to start his career.

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<sup>73</sup> Kollányi, *Esztergomi kanonokok*, 77.

<sup>74</sup> Ferencz Kollányi, "Visitatio Capituli E. M. Strigoniensis anno 1397," *Történelmi tár*, Új folyam II, no. 2 (1901): 251.